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SUBJECT: IRISH GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS U.S. ASSURANCES ON
TRANSFER OF PRISONERS

¶1. Summary: On December 14, Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern was asked a number of questions in the Irish Parliament in relation to the alleged transfer of prisoners, by the U.S., through Shannon airport. He repeated the Irish Government's position that they are satisfied with assurances given by the U.S. that no such flights have taken place. On questions relating to the use of white phosphorus in Iraq, Ahern reiterated that the Irish Government accepted the assurances given by a friendly government. End Summary

¶2. On December 14, Irish Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern was asked a number of questions in the Irish Parliament in relation to the alleged transfer of prisoners by the U.S. through Shannon airport. Ahern stated that the Irish Government is "completely opposed to extraordinary rendition and has not, and will not, permit any flight used for this purpose to pass through an Irish airport or through Irish airspace." He told Parliament that the U.S. Administration had given the Irish Government "repeated, clear and explicit assurances" that no prisoners have been transferred through Irish airports, and nor would they be without the permission of the Irish Government. Ireland has a long-standing practice of accepting the assurances of a friendly Government and Ahern said he has no reason to believe that Irish airports have been used for such purposes.

¶3. The Irish Government has raised the issue of extraordinary rendition with the U.S. through every available forum, including the EU, the U.S. embassy in Dublin, Irish embassy in Washington and the Minister's December 1, discussion with Secretary Rice, and are satisfied with the assurances given, Ahern said. Responding to suggestions that the assurances might be qualified in some way by the definition of torture, as applied by the U.S. government, Ahern said "The assurances we have received have contained no reference to the purposes for which any prisoners might be transferred which could be used to limit the broad scope of those assurances. In the wider European context, they are of particular clarity and completeness." He added that if it ever emerged that, contrary to the Governments belief, Irish airports or airspace have been used for the purpose of extraordinary rendition, the Government would take the "gravest possible view of the matter."

WHITE PHOSPHORUS

¶4. Ahern was also asked, by Labour's Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Michael D. Higgins, about the use of white phosphorus in Iraq. Ahern responded by saying that while the Irish Government is completely opposed to the use of chemical weapons, white phosphorus is classified as a conventional weapon, not a chemical weapon. He said that

the U.S. embassy informed the Department of Foreign Affairs that white phosphorus has been used in Iraq, but only as an incendiary weapon against enemy combatants and extreme lengths have been taken to ensure it was not used in the proximity of civilians. Ahern said "The Irish Government accepts these assurances."

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